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ABSTRACT

The New York City Adult Literacy Initiative is described and evaluated. The program served about 50,000 adult learners in program year 1988-89. The initiative includes programs of the City University of New York, the New York City Board of Education, community-based organizations under the direction of the Community Development Agency, and three public library systems. Most of the diverse student body is enrolled in basic education (BE) or English as a Second Language (ESL). The report contains the following: (1) a profile of the student population's gender, ethnic, and age distribution; (2) a brief description of the program's diversity and range; (3) BE and ESL student distributions by instructional level; (4) data on instructional and contact hours; (5) student employment patterns and literacy gains; (6) program costs; and (7) successes and challenges of 1988-89. A list of participating agencies, including addresses and contact persons, is appended. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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THE NEW YORK CITY ADULT LITERACY INITIATIVE

Final Report 1988 - 89

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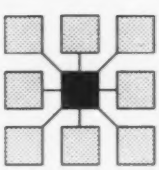
THE NEW YORK CITY ADULT LITERACY INITIATIVE

Final Report 1988-89



Prepared by:
Literacy Assistance Center, Inc.
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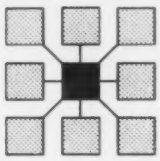
THIS REPORT HAS BEEN PREPARED UNDER A CONTRACT WITH THE OFFICE OF THE MAYOR, THE CITY OF NEW YORK, AND THE NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT, AS PART OF THE SUPPORT SERVICE COMPONENT OF THE NEW YORK CITY ADULT LITERACY INITIATIVE.

PREFACE



Various estimates suggest that there are approximately 1.5 million New York City adults, including out-of-school youth ages 16 and up, with non-functional literacy skills - i.e., they cannot read, write or compute at levels necessary to perform many of the tasks required in our society. Each year thousands of these New Yorkers seek out education programs of the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative to improve their reading, writing and computing skills, or to learn the English language. These individuals bring with them a very wide range of abilities, needs, interests and goals. They seek out programs that will meet their educational, personal, and geographic needs.

After much hard work, these adults begin to sense progress and gain self-confidence. Often, they find themselves functioning as never before in a literate society; they develop new skills which enable them, for example, to:

read a newspaper;
apply for a job or promotion;
write a letter;
read a petition or election ballot;
understand instructions on a medicine bottle; or
read stories to their children.

This report presents, in summary fashion, the work of the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative for the fiscal year 1988-1989. A social and demographic profile for the approximately 50,000 students enrolled in Initiative programs is drawn. Information on enrollment patterns for Basic Education (BE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and Basic Education in the Native Language (BENL) is presented; and the average number of hours students spend in instruction is given. Also included in this report is information on the indicators of student academic gains, employment patterns, and other achievement outcomes.

The New York City Adult Literacy Initiative offers a range of diverse programs through a network of Literacy Provider Agencies (LPAs) - the New York City Board of Education, the Community Development Agency, the City University of New York, and the public libraries of Manhattan, Queens, and Brooklyn. Programs are conducted in all five boroughs of New York City.

The Literacy Assistance Center, established to facilitate implementation of the Initiative, serves as a central support unit for the Initiative and engages in research, data collection, staff training, technical assistance, and referral services for prospective students as well as volunteers.

This report has been prepared by staff of the Literacy Assistance Center, based on data provided by the local literacy programs funded by the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative. The staff at the LAC gratefully acknowledge the work of these local programs and the LPAs in collecting the data and their cooperation in submitting the necessary information.

Many people have been involved in putting together this brief report. We especially want to acknowledge Gregory Fallon who served as writer and editor, and Edward Noriega who provided the design and layout.

Angela M. Covert, Ed. D.
Executive Director

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INTRODUCTION

The New York City Adult Literacy Initiative, coordinated by the New York City Mayor's Office of Education Services and the New York State Education Department, served approximately 50,000 adult learners in program year 1988-89.

The City's program has become one of the largest in the nation and is now recognized as a national model for both its range of services for adult learners as well as its high level of coordination.

The Initiative includes programs of the City University of New York, the Board of Education, community-based organizations under the direction of the Community Development Agency, and the three public library systems. The programs take place at: 14 college campuses; over 175 Board of Education sites (public schools, community organizations, and unions); 24 branch libraries (19 of which have newly constructed learning centers); and 40 community-based organizations that combine literacy instruction with social services and community support.

A central support agency, the Literacy Assistance Center (LAC), established in 1983, maintains a data base on all programs and students; it also provides a citywide referral service, staff development and systemwide research.

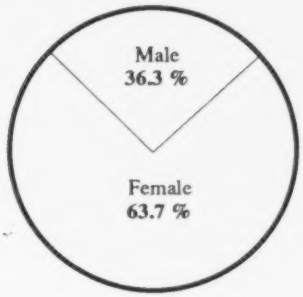
The great majority of the Initiative's students are enrolled in either Basic Education (BE) or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). The student body is best characterized by its diversity. In Basic Education, one finds students ranging from recent high school dropouts who moved through the educational system without learning to read, to retirees who after a life of work felt a desire to return to school and renew their education.

In ESOL classes, one also sees a range of adults: from those who have lived for many years in New York, managing to get along in jobs and communities where English is not essential, to recent immigrants who immersed themselves immediately in the language of their newly adopted home. There are ESOL students with little or no formal education in their native language as well as others who are professionals with advanced degrees in their native countries.

The strength of the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative resides in its ability to meet the needs of such a diverse population and provide these students with an environment in which to flourish.

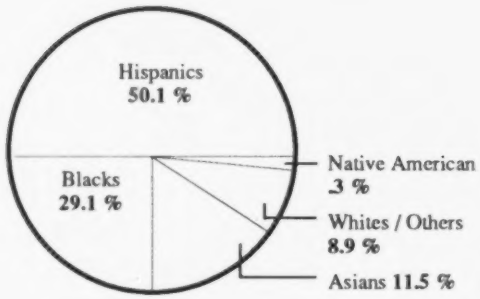
SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Information collected from the past year's nearly 50,000 adult literacy students in New York City produces the following social and demographic profile: *



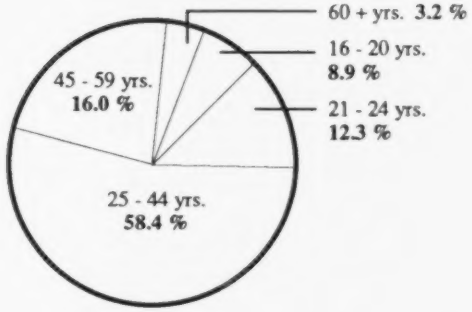
SEX

- *Nearly two-thirds of the Initiative's students are female, while just over one-third are male.*



RACE / ETHNICITY

- *Almost 4 out of 5 adult learners are either Hispanic or Black.*



AGE

- *Nearly 3 out of 5 students are between the ages of 25 and 44.*

The New York City Adult Literacy Initiative Final Report 1988-89

* Figures used in this report reflect students and services at CUNY, Board of Education, and community-based programs; students and services of the public libraries are not included. See appendix for description of the data sources.

DIVERSITY AND RANGE IN THE INITIATIVE

The Initiative's literacy programs are designed to accommodate a wide range of adult students' interests and needs. Programs are set up throughout the five boroughs in colleges, public schools, community organizations, libraries, unions, and a range of local agencies and service centers. Classes are offered days, evenings, and Saturdays in order to provide a range of scheduling options for any adult who wants to learn.

Various instructional models are employed to enable adults to obtain the most from the time they spend in programs. Students may learn within numerous frameworks, such as: conventional classes; small groups; individual tutorials; and, independent study in laboratories with computer-assisted instruction.

Moreover, the Initiative has extended its reach and adapted its form to provide literacy instruction in cooperation with other social service programs, such as:

- ***drug rehabilitation programs;***
- ***services for ex-offenders and youth in trouble with the law;***
- ***special services for youth - vocational, artistic, and health; and***
- ***services for refugees and recent immigrants.***

At the same time, continued efforts are made to meet the needs of other special populations, such as: senior citizens; people with hearing or visual impairments; and workers at their job sites.

One special group, among the many, is that of parents with school-age children. To meet the needs of these parents, a "Reading Aloud Together" program was implemented this past year at several literacy sites. In this program, parents are taught active reading strategies using children's literature. They are then encouraged to borrow books, read to their children at home, and report back on their children's responses.

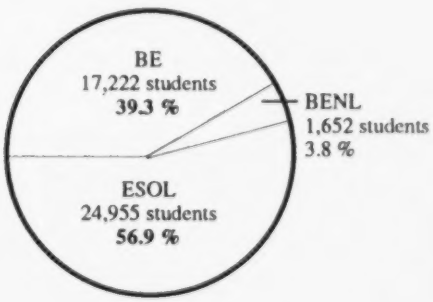
One site in Brooklyn reports tremendous success with this program. Parents feel the real gratification of pleasing their children with stories. The happy result is that the adults continue to read to their children, and, at the same time, deepen their own comprehension skills and enjoyment of literature. In this way, an important bond of literacy between parent and child forms and strengthens.

BE AND ESOL ENROLLMENT

"Before I came to this program, I couldn't write one sentence. I only knew how to read a few words. I didn't watch TV and listen to the radio. I couldn't talk to the neighbors all day. I was like a crazy woman. I am happier than before."

ESOL Student

The New York City Adult Literacy Initiative focuses its efforts primarily on Basic Education (BE) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). In 1988-89, students in these programs made up 96% of the student population; the approximately 4% remaining were enrolled in Basic Education in the Native Language (BENL) classes.



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Basic Education (BE) instruction is aimed at improving reading and writing skills for adults testing below the ninth grade level on a standardized test.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) instruction is designed to improve speaking skills and listening comprehension in English. Most often, the emphasis is on the spoken rather than the written language. Increasingly though, students' writing is used as a tool in language development.

Basic Education in the Native Language (BENL) instruction aims to improve reading and writing skills of adults in their native language. It targets adults performing below the ninth grade level on a standardized test.

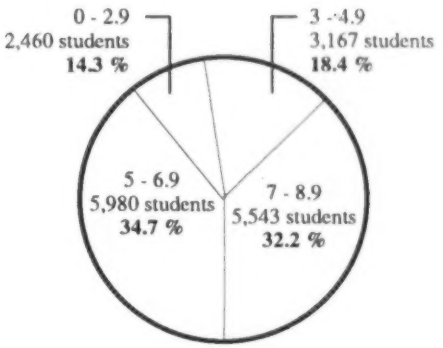
The BE and ESOL programs are further broken down into four instructional levels. In BE, the four levels are determined by performance on a standardized test, the Test of Adult Basic English (TABE). In ESOL, student placement in the four levels is determined by an individually administered oral/aural exam (the John Test).

The Initiative's guidelines recommend that adult learners in the two lower levels of BE and ESOL make up half of the student population in literacy programs. The Initiative remains committed to attracting and serving this population most in need.

"I did not know how to read or write to my children. When they came home from school, they brought home papers that I could not help them to do. I made up my mind to come to school. Since I have come to school I have learned to read and write and how to do math. I feel good about myself."

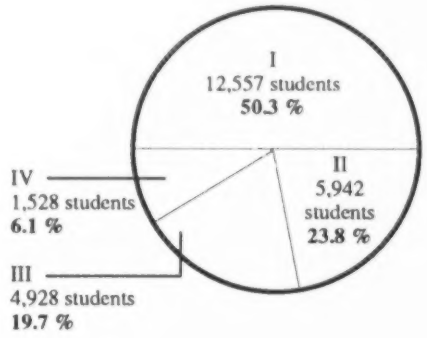
BE Student

BE
Instructional Level



● *One-third of adult learners in BE are enrolled in the two lower levels.*

ESOL
Instructional Level



● *Approximately 3 out of 4 ESOL students are enrolled in the two lower levels. These are the classes which try to meet initial language needs.*

INSTRUCTIONAL HOURS AND CONTACT HOURS

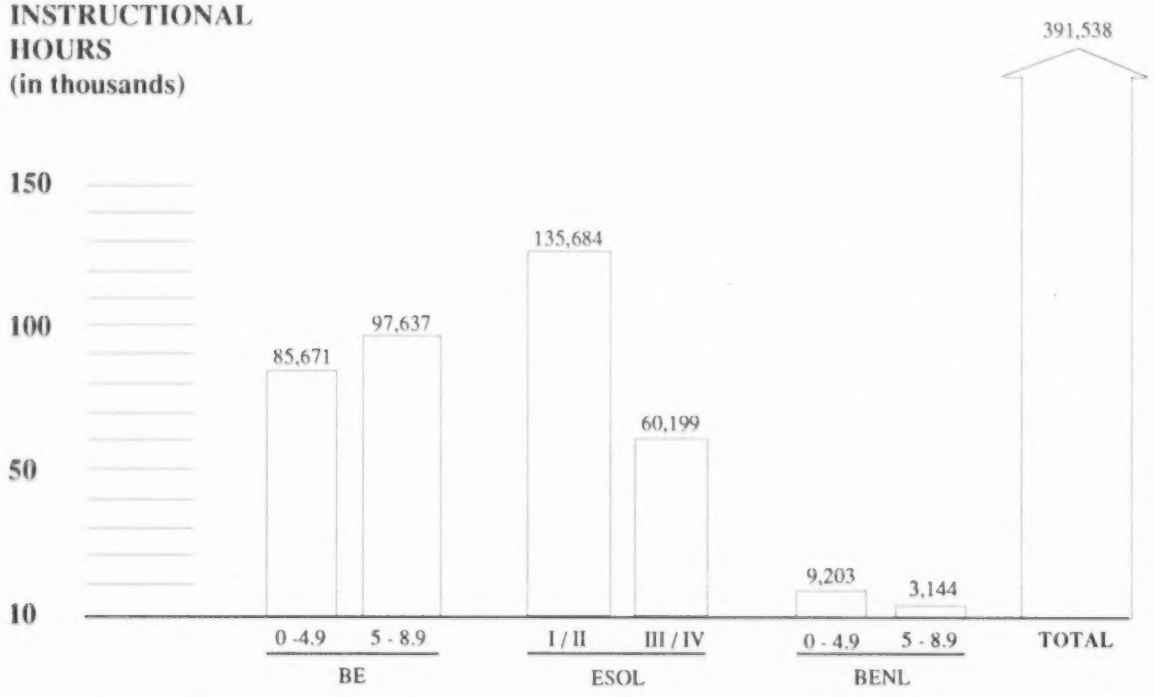
In 1988-89, the NYC Adult Literacy Initiative's BE, ESOL, and BENL programs provided adult learners with nearly 400,000 instructional hours. Instructional hours represent the number of hours of instruction offered by programs, regardless of enrollment (e.g., a 3-hour class is counted as 3 instructional hours, whether attended by 9 students or 25).

The students, for their part, put approximately 5,000,000 hours into their education.

These are contact hours, which represent the number of hours students spend in the classroom receiving instruction (e.g., a class providing 3 instructional hours would yield 75 contact hours if attended by 25 students).

The following graphs present instructional hours and contact hours by type of instruction and by instructional level:

INSTRUCTIONAL HOURS (in thousands)



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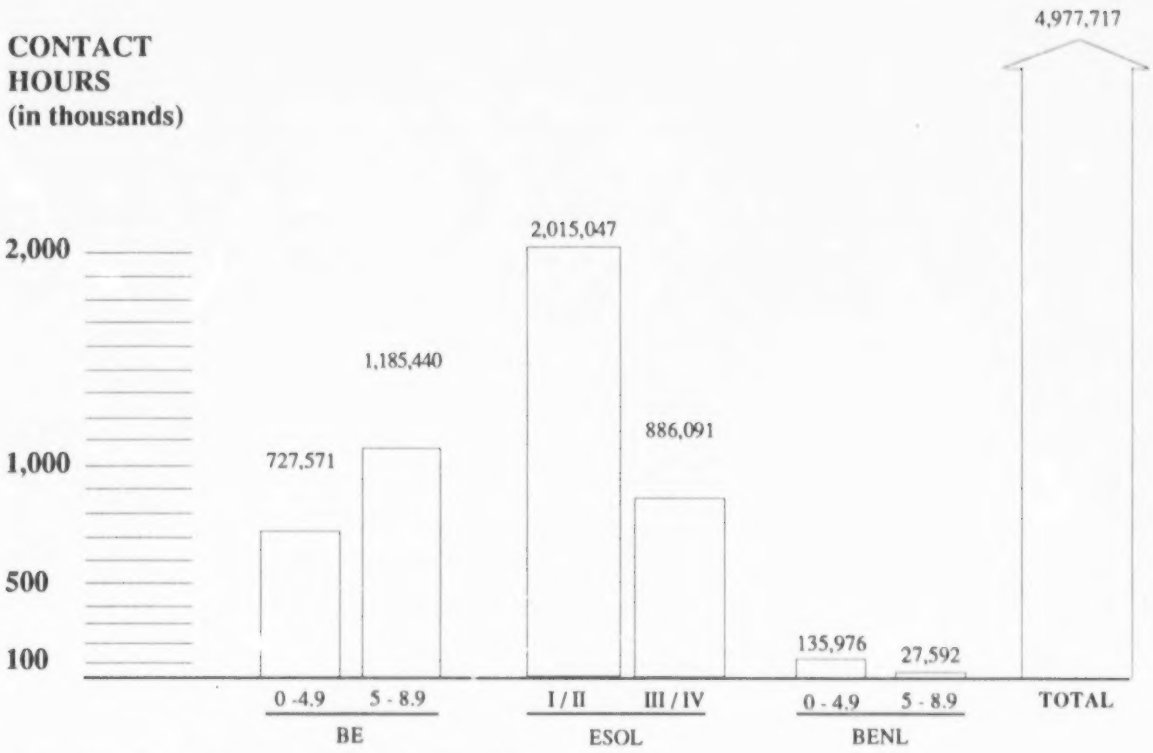


The New York City Adult Literacy Initiative Final Report 1988-89

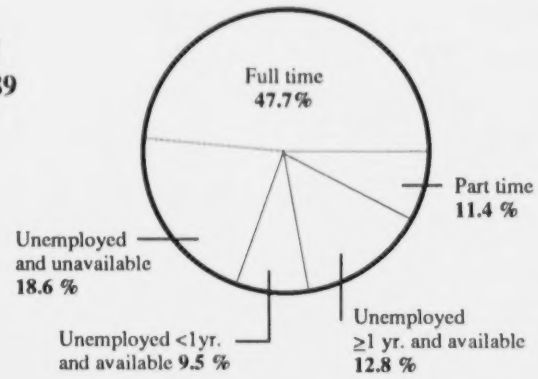
- *Though only one-third of the adult learners in BE are in the 0-4.9 instructional level range, they receive 47% of the instructional hours; this indicates the importance placed on a low student-to-teacher ratio to foster this group's early reading development.*

- *BE students in the 0-4.9 range put in on average 128 contact hours per student; this represents 25 contact hours more per student than the attendance of higher level BE students.*

- *Adults in the beginning levels of ESOL register nearly 70% of the classroom contact hours.*

LITERACY AND EMPLOYMENT

ADULT STUDENT EMPLOYMENT SITUATION IN PROGRAM YEAR 1988 - 89



The New York City Adult Literacy Initiative Final Report 1988-89

A major goal of the Initiative is to improve the employment outlook for New York City residents. Initiative programs provide general employment readiness training and vocational counseling to many of their adult learners. Instructors often employ materials relating to the everyday tasks that workers perform at their jobs. In a special workplace literacy program, classes are actually held at the work site.

Adults who attend literacy programs are motivated very often by a desire to find employment, improve their performance in their current occupations, attain promotions or new jobs, and/or begin a career. The Initiative works hard at reaching those adults who are not employed and strives to prepare them for the increasingly sophisticated job demands of the present day.

During program year 1988-89:

- ***nearly 2,000 adults reported obtaining a job;***
- ***another 800 adults reported getting a better job; and***
- ***approximately 500 adults reported either removing themselves from public assistance or reducing the amount they received.***

It should be noted that these figures underrepresent the total because they register only those changes in status that occured during the program year 1988-1989. Additionally, these data are dependent on students' reporting the information to the program. If a student obtained a job after completing the program, say in July, the fact could not be recorded. In addition, many more adults undoubtedly obtained jobs or removed themselves from public assistance without notifying their programs.

GAIN

"After I started going back to school I felt good. I felt that I did have a place in society. Now I can read a little and I am no longer afraid when my children bring a book or paper to me. It's a good feeling."

BE Student

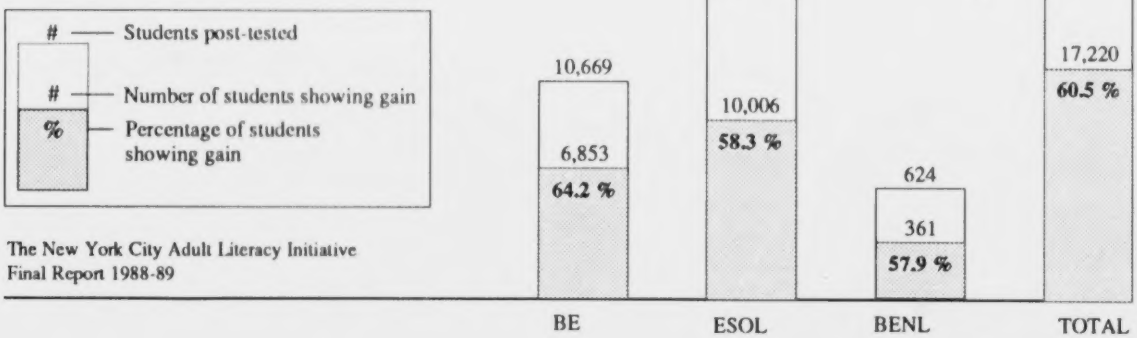
For statistical purposes, student achievement is measured by gain on standardized tests. But, as a BE student reminds us, the sense of gain a student may feel is not easily revealed in test scores.

When students enter literacy programs, they are given a test to assess their levels of literacy abilities. The test is used to determine class placement and to provide a baseline which can be used later to document the students' progress. The standard instruments used are the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE) for students enrolled in Basic Education, and the John Test for those enrolled in English for Speakers of Other Languages. An improvement of .5 or more in grade level constitutes gain on the TABE; an increase of 10 points or more on the John Test similarly is considered gain.

As already noted, a number of adults obtained jobs or got better jobs while enrolled in literacy programs. Other examples of achievement, as reported by students, during the 1988-1989 program year are as follows:

- ***nearly 900 adults advanced from BE classes to High School Equivalency classes leading to a General Equivalency Diploma (GED);***
- ***another 1,600 adult learners obtained a GED;***
- ***an additional 1,300 adults entered other educational programs; and***
- ***approximately 2,000 students registered to vote.***

STUDENTS SHOWING TEST GAIN
(as a proportion of all students post-tested)



The New York City Adult Literacy Initiative
Final Report 1988-89

COST

"I feel great that they do have programs now to help you. There are some people who can't make it and they want programs bad. Babies, jobs, sickness all keep you from coming, but at least there are programs now."

BE Student

During the 1988-89 program year, the State and City provided approximately $31.2 million to programs offering free literacy services to adults under the auspices of the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative. Of this sum, $21.2 million was allocated directly to providing instructional services at City University campuses, community-based organizations and Board of Education sites, whose students are reported upon here. For these programs:

the average cost per instructional hour was $53; the average cost per contact hour was $4; and the average cost per student was $434.

An additional $2.6 million was allocated to the three public library systems, which provide small group and individual tutorial instruction, computer-assisted instruction, and study tables, as well as space and both print and audio-visual materials (including sets of instructional materials) for use by other literacy programs.

The remaining funds were used for a wide range of support and administrative services provided by the literacy provider agencies and the Literacy Assistance Center. Among the Initiative-wide services were staff development, program oversight and technical assistance, counselor training, data processing and analysis, referral services, and special projects of various kinds.

"We have two counselors at our largest program. We do more than counsel. They help people get jobs, housing, etc. People say they can't stay in school because they're about to be evicted or their child is going to jail. We can alleviate it so they can go to school."

Counselor for BE programs

SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

"Without words you can't do anything. I love words. I love God. Words is God. God do all His work by words, so it is important for everyone to read and write and know words."

BE Student

With the help of the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative, thousands of adults have improved their reading, writing, and speaking skills during the past year.

Adults learners have announced: "I can read a newspaper and read things on the bus or on the train;" and, "I feel very proud to sit and write and write. Sometimes I just don't want to stop." The beneficial effect of increased literacy on people's lives has been immeasurable.

However, despite the extension and efforts of the Initiative, and the enrichment it has brought to many lives, the approximately 50,000 adults reached this past year represent only a small percentage of New York City's adults with non-functional literacy skills; the number served is perhaps as low as 3% of those eligible. A similarly small percentage is being reached state and nationwide.

Unfortunately, many students who wish to enroll in programs are turned away because classes are filled. The waiting list for New York City literacy programs, especially those for ESOL classes, is estimated to have reached 15,000 adults in 1989.

To compound the current literacy problems, recent New York State estimates indicate the number of functionally illiterate adults is increasing at a rate of over 9 times the growth rate of the state's total population. The number of adults with low reading levels will have risen from over 2.8 million in 1987 to approximately 3.3 million in 1992 — an increase of 17%.

Presently, programs are operating at full capacity based on current levels of resources — space as well as funds to support programs. The single greatest challenge now facing the Initiative is to determine the means to increase its capacity in order to serve larger numbers of adult learners. Indeed, accommodating thousands more adults, out of a rapidly expanding functionally illiterate population, is of paramount concern to all New Yorkers.

Progress has been made. We may celebrate with thousands of adults their advances. Now, in the '90s, our clear challenge is to build upon and to surpass these recent successes.

APPENDIX

"I read better than I did before. Vocabulary — I picked up a great deal. My math. I can pick up a book and read it all without stopping. If I don't know a word I can look it up. My math I was always behind in. Before if I couldn't do a problem I would give up. Now I'll put it aside for a while and come back to it later. Being in a program taught me to put things aside and be more patient."

BE Student

All programs in the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative submit annual reports to the City and State. The aggregate figures from these reports form the basis of this description of the Initiative for the 1988-1989 program year. Data collection and processing are done through a computerized management information system: programs at City University campuses and at community-based organizations utilize the ALIES (Adult Literacy Information and Evaluation System) micro-computer system; and Board of Education programs use a central mainframe system.

The figures used throughout this report reflect students and services at CUNY, community-based organizations and Board of Education programs. Due to a different record-keeping and reporting system, figures from the public libraries are not available in a comparable format. There are also approximately 3,000 adults served in GED classes at CUNY whose reading level at entry is below ninth grade and who are thus part of the Initiative; however, information on their hours, tests, and demographic characteristics is maintained within the GED program and is not included here.

In addition to producing official final reports for submission to funders, data from the two systems—ALIES and the Board of Education system—are combined and edited at the end of each program year to produce the New York City Adult Literacy Data Base. Various statistical analyses are run on these data, to generate a more detailed demographic profile of students and to address a range of issues raised by practitioners, funders, and policy-makers. Additional information on the data base analyses may be obtained through the Literacy Assistance Center.

THE NEW YORK CITY ADULT LITERACY INITIATIVE

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APPLICATION FOR EMPLOYMENT

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

PERSONAL INFORMATION

STATUS OF ORIGIN

EMPLOYMENT DESIRED

EDUCATION

DRIVER'S LICENSE APPLICATION

APPLICATION FOR PERSONAL LOAN

Personal Loan Department

EMPLOYMENT DATA